

The end (..or a short course on eschatology)

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Basics

The study of end times (“eschatology” it is called) is important for a Christian (new or old) “to know with certainty the hope to which they are called.” It is especially critical because as one resource says:ⁱⁱ

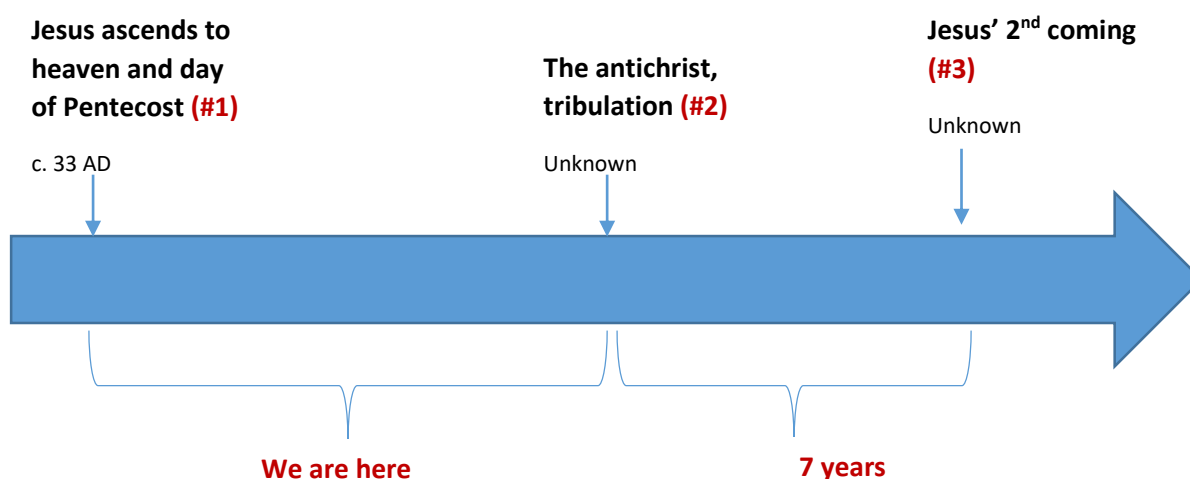
It is hardly possible to overestimate the importance of eschatology to Christian faith: life without faith is empty, and faith without hope is impossible. If the “eschatology” of modern science—Death for the individual, death for the species, death for the entire system of wheeling suns which we call the universe—is the only truth by which man can live, then indeed “let us eat, and drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

The Christian, however, does not believe that death is the last word. For him the resurrection of Christ has robbed death of its victory and brought hope and immortality to light. It is the content of this hope that the Christian doctrine of eschatology sets forth.”

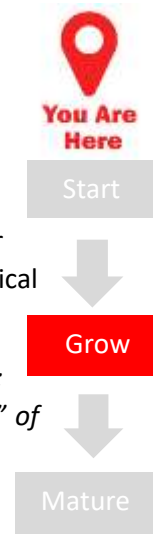
The challenge with studying eschatology for the Christian is a lot of prophetic books of the bible – e.g Daniel, Joel and Revelation which cover the end times are complicated through the use of symbolism, extended time lines and a style unique to this genre of biblical writing which can make interpreting it a fertile ground for confusion, disagreement, lies, deceptions and half-truths.

Thankfully in the midst of these complications Jesus has left us with some clear lamp posts or beacons to guide us safely in the murky waters of time. This article helps by making those lamp posts clear and leaving the more complicated matters to those who are called to delve into the specifics of this area.

So, where are we now?



The time line above gives three clear lampposts which we can use to know “the time” as explained below.



Lamp post #1: Pentecost.

We are in a period which the Old Testament writers called “the Last days” (Heb 1:2) or the “Day of the Lord”. The defining moment of this time begun with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as described in the Prophetic book of Joel (2:1 and 2: 28) as follows:

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand...

“...And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:”

How do we know this is the first lamp post? The Apostle Peter specifically mentioned this passage in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. He described it as follows in Acts 2: 14-17 (NLT):

“These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people, your sons and daughters will prophesy.”

Lamp post #2: The Anti-Christ, tribulation (and rapture).

Three closely interconnected things must happen before Jesus comes back a second time, these are:

- 1) **A time of great tribulation;**
- 2) The **man of lawlessness must be revealed** (the anti-Christ, the beast, 666, the abomination of desolation; and
- 3) The **rapture must take place**. “Rapture” is derived from the Greek word “harpazo” which means to “snatch away” or “seize” and then from the Latin “rapiemur”ⁱⁱⁱ. Christians believe those who are alive at the time of Jesus’ coming will be “caught up” in the clouds to meet him.

A time of great tribulation.

Christians have endured tribulation throughout the ages, but the bible says that there is a tribulation coming when God will “judge the unbelieving, godless inhabitants of the earth” (Revelation 6 – 18).

Jesus said about this period: *“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.”* (Matthew 24: 21).

It is this tribulation differentiated from all others that is called “the Great Tribulation.”

There is some disagreement or confusion in this area among Christian scholars. Some sources speak of a “tribulation” followed by “the Great Tribulation”. Other sources indicate that the tribulation already occurred (at least in part) in AD 70^{iv} and culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, particularly owing to Jesus’ description of events culminating in his difficult statement in Mark 9: 1 .^v

The general picture of this general tribulation is however this^{vi}:

- The length of this tribulation will be 7 years (Daniel 9: 24 – 27);
- In this period, a man called the “Anti-Christ” will make a peace pact with the world (Daniel 9: 24 – 27);
- Half way through this 7 year period (3 and a half years), this Anti-Christ (“the Beast”) will break the Peace Pact. (Daniel 9: 24 – 27, Revelations 13: 5).

- This Beast will therefore be in power for these latter 3 and half years. During this period there will be a great rebellion against God (apostasy) and his worshippers will receive the “mark of the beast” (commonly called “666”) where no one can buy or sell unless they have this mark on their forehead or hand (revelations 13: 15 – 18).
- Jesus will destroy this Anti-Christ with his breath and brightness at his second coming (2 Thessalonians 2: 8).

The Anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2: 2-8)

This anti-Christ, also called “the man of lawlessness” or “the abomination of desolation”, “the beast” or “666” is dealt with in many prophetic books and the various names are generally believed to refer to the same person. A man who will be given Satan’s powers to perform deceitful miracles. He is described in one account as below:

“Now, dear brothers and sisters, let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. Don’t be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don’t believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us. Don’t be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.”

Don’t you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you? And you know what is holding him back, for he can be revealed only when his time comes. For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way. Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, but the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming.”

Rapture of believers (1 Thessalonians 4: 15)

We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

There is some confusion or disagreement among Christian scholars. Some say believers will go through this tribulation period (“posttribulationists”) while others say the “rapture” will take place before this period (as the Holy Spirit who holds the man of lawlessness at bay will still be in the world and only be taken at the rapture) (“pre tribulationists”) – see *Appendix 1* which covers a comparison of the two positions.

Lamp post #3: Christ’s return.

As the passage of the in 2 Thessalonians 2 above shows, the rapture and Jesus’ return appear to coincide or are simultaneous. As for the actual return, Jesus said that his return would be visible by all, from heaven.

Proof 1 – Angels telling the apostles on Jesus’ ascension:

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Proof 2 – Jesus himself said how he will come.

“Then the high priest said to him, “I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” Jesus replied, “You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.””

What happens after Jesus’ second coming?

A number of things will take place, primarily Jesus’ 1,000 year reign (millennium) and then there will be a final judgement and a New Creation. *Appendix 1* describes these events using both a “pre tribulation” and “post tribulation” comparative.

But what does the end times mean for you personally?

Everything about the end times is irrelevant if you are not living righteously or die before Jesus’ second coming. The bible makes it clear that death is a form of judgement:

“And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9: 27).

God will judge you based on your actions – this side of life, so this is probably the most important thing for you to focus on.

Jesus has also persistently warned us not to focus ourselves too much on the specific dates and times because he declares that No one, not prophets, not the angels, not even him knows the day of the Lord – only God the father (Mark 13: 32).

He expects us to live our lives in a sense of Holy expectation for that day will come “Like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5: 2) – Whether you that day is your personal day (the day of your death) or the day of the Lord’s return.

You can otherwise see in *Appendix 2* a time line for your own personal journey to help you as you consider these things.

Appendix 1: The chronology of end time events (from the bible)

(Two views)

| | Pre tribulation view ^{vii} | | Post tribulation view ^{viii} |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | The rapture of the church | ← | 1. The rise of the antichrist |
| 2 | The rise of the anti-Christ (as the church is taken “out of the way”) | | 2. The tribulation |
| 3 | The tribulation . A 7 year period of God’s wrath as described in Revelations. During this period, the following 3 things also happen: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The <i>battle of Gog and Magog</i> – a great army attacks Israel. They are defeated by God’s supernatural intervention (Ezekiel 38 – 39) b) The <i>abomination of desolation</i>. The half-way point during the 7 years when the Anti-Christ breaks covenant with Israel and show his “true colours”. The Jews turn to Jesus, realising he is their saviour. Great persecution of Christians. c) The <i>battle of Armageddon</i>. Jesus returns with Heaven’s armies at the end of the tribulation and saves Jerusalem. The Anti-Christ and his prophet are captured and thrown into the lake of fire. | → | 3. The rapture of the church (resurrection of the righteous rapture and Christ’s 2 nd return are all simultaneous – “in the twinkling of an eye”) |
| 4 | The judgment of nations . Christ will judge the survivors of the tribulation, separating the righteous from the wicked as “sheep” and “goats”. | | Generally similar views held at this stage onwards with the Pre Tribulation view. |
| 5 | The binding of Satan . Satan will be bound and held in a bottomless pit for the next 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1–3). | | |
| 6 | The millennial kingdom . Jesus Himself will rule the world, and Jerusalem will be the capital. This will be a 1,000-year period of peace and prosperity on earth (Revelation 20 ; Isaiah 60–62). Memorial sacrifices will be offered in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40–48). | | |
| 7 | The last battle . At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan will be released from his prison for a short time. He will deceive the nations once again, and there will be a rebellion against the Lord that will be quickly defeated (Revelation 20:7–10). Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, never to reappear. | | |
| 8 | The great white throne judgement . All those in hell will be brought forth, and all the wicked from all eras of history will be resurrected to stand before God in a final judgment (Revelation 20:11–15). The verdicts are read, and all of sinful humanity is cast into the lake of fire. | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| 9 | The new creation . God completely remakes the heavens and the earth. It is at this time that God wipes away all tears and there will be no more pain, death, or sorrow. The New Jerusalem descends from heaven, and the children of God will enjoy eternity with Him (Revelation 21–22). | | |
|---|---|--|--|

Pre tribulation strengths and weaknesses are explained in summary thus^{ix}:

Strengths of this view:

- The church is not appointed to wrath ([1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#), [5:9](#))
- Believers will not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord ([1 Thessalonians 5:1-9](#)).
- The church of Philadelphia was promised to be kept from “the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world” ([Revelation 3:10](#)). Note that the promise is not preservation through the trial but deliverance from the hour, that is, from the time period of the trial.

Weaknesses of this view.

- One perceived weakness of pretribulationism is its relatively recent development as a church doctrine, not having been formulated in detail until the early 1800s.
- pretribulationism splits the return of Jesus Christ into two “phases”—the Rapture and the Second Coming—whereas the Bible does not clearly delineate any such phases.

Post tribulation’s strength and weakness is explained in summary as follows:^x

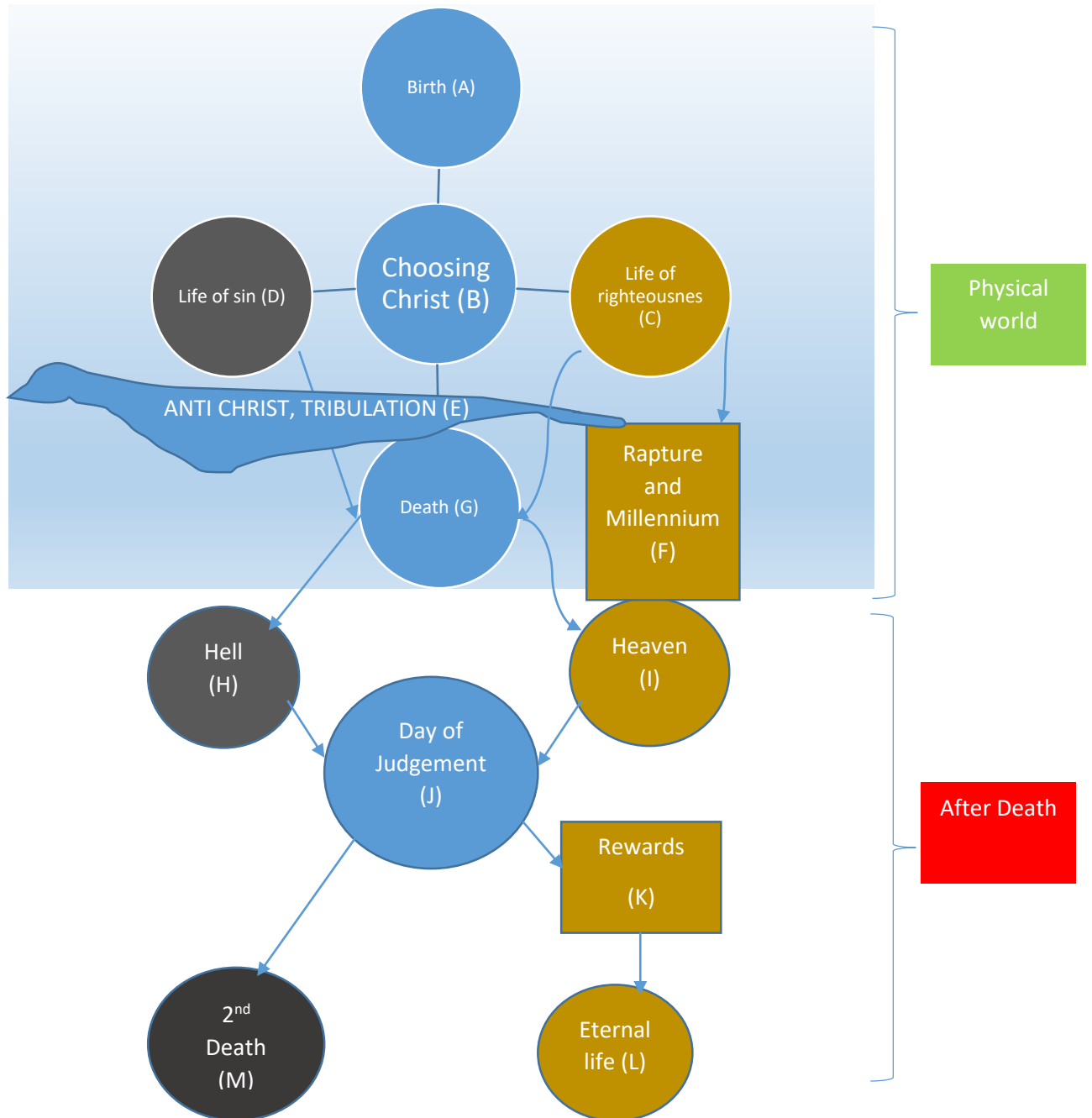
Strengths of this view:

- Jesus, in His extended discourse on the end times, says He will return after a “great tribulation” ([Matthew 24:21](#), [29](#)). Also, the book of Revelation, with all its various prophecies, mentions only one coming of the Lord—and that occurs after the Tribulation ([Revelation 19-20](#)).
- Passages such as [Revelation 13:7](#) and [20:9](#) also lend support to posttribulationism in that there will obviously be saints in the Tribulation.
- The resurrection of the dead in [Revelation 20:5](#) is called “the first resurrection.” Posttribulationists assert that, since this “first” resurrection takes place after the Tribulation, the resurrection associated with the Rapture in [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) cannot occur until then.

Weaknesses of this view.

- The clear teaching of Scripture that those who are in Christ are not under condemnation and will never experience the wrath of God ([Romans 8:1](#)). While some judgments during the Tribulation specifically target the unsaved, many other judgments, such as the earthquakes, falling stars, and famines, will affect the saved and unsaved equally. Thus, if believers go through the Tribulation, they will experience the wrath of God, in contradiction of [Romans 8:1](#).

Appendix 2: Your personal end times flow chart.



A – Pre appointment at birth

The bible takes the view of “pre-election”. God knows us at the beginning, before we were born. Two examples for the encouragement of the saints especially are:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1: 5)

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (Romans 8: 28 – 29, NIV).

B – Choosing Salvation

Salvation is a choice every one of us must make. It is not made for us (by our parents for example) and it is not ours automatically (e.g a birth right by ancestry, heritage et al).

“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1: 11-13, NIV)

C – Life of righteousness

Having chosen life, you must go on to live a life of righteousness. For you continue to “work out your salvation”. It is not a one off event (at conversion), it is a race, you should strive to win (or you will be disqualified).

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2: 12)

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” (1 Corinthians 9: 24).

D – Life of sin

If you live a life of sin, do not expect to get into heaven. Christians especially who continually live a life style of sin are at risk.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh craves what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are opposed to one another, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and sorcery; hatred, discord, jealousy, and rage; rivalries, divisions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no Law. (Galatians 5: 16 – 22).

E – The end of times, the Anti-Christ (666, Beast) and Tribulation

F – What is the rapture and Millennium?

See Appendix 1

G – Death

Death is a final point of reckoning.

“And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9: 27).

At death – the body returns to the ground (dust to dust) while the spirit returns to God who gave it (Eccl 12: 7).

The bible defines “the first death” and the “second death”. All of us go through this first death, but for the righteous, the second death has no hold (rev 20: 6).

There is some ambiguity in the bible with terms like “hell” “hades” “sheol” as used in the bible. There is also some ambiguity in which state the soul is after someone dies. It seems this is some form of “intermediate” state – where the evil are in a “place of torment” (Luke 16: 19 – 31). While the righteous are in “paradise” (Luke 23: 43) or are in Heaven, which is where God’s throne is (Matthew 5: 34) and they are waiting for God to restore them (Rev 6: 9 -11).

This ambiguity is clearly settled for the righteous in Christ – who are raised when Jesus comes back a second time – the dead in Christ rise first. At the rapture (1 Thess 4: 15). It would seem this is a reunification of their physical bodies with their spirits.

H – Hell – see G above.

I - Heaven – See G above.

J – Day of Judgement (the Day of the Lord). All those in hell will be brought forth, and all the wicked from all eras of history will be resurrected to stand before God in a [final judgment \(Revelation 20:11–15\)](#). The verdicts are read, and all of sinful humanity is cast into the lake of fire (the 2nd death). Satan and death will also be cast into this lake of fire.

K – Rewards. The righteous will be “judged” or “evaluated” by God in order to give them different rewards or “crowns” based on their life on earth.

“For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, his workmanship will be evident, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will prove the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive a reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as if through the flames.” (1 Cor 3: 10-15)

L – Eternal life

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21: 1- 4, NIV)

M – the 2nd death. See J above.

Your turn

What will you now do differently? Examples to think about include:

- What commonly held views of yours are now changed with the pre vs post tribulation comparison time lines?
- In what will you straighten your path now knowing a man's day (whether his death) or the Lord's Day come "as a thief in the night"?
- How do you live your life as a believer knowing there is a form of "judgement" or "evaluation" of your works and rewards based on this?

Write here

Notes

ⁱ Ephesians 1: 18

ⁱⁱ <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/eschatology>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapture>

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/AD-70.html>

^v Mark 9: 1 (NIV) "And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

^{vi} <https://www.gotquestions.org/Great-Tribulation.html>

^{vii} Timeline/Explanation of this view: <https://www.gotquestions.org/end-times-timeline.html>. Criticism of this view/weakness can be found here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/pretribulationism.html>

^{viii} <https://www.gotquestions.org/posttribulationism.html>

^{ix} <https://www.gotquestions.org/pretribulationism.html>

^x <https://www.gotquestions.org/posttribulationism.html>